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“recurring nightmares” and “unresolved grief” (p. 209) was her commitment to “relearning what I thought I had lost, . . . the ancient Lakota teachings of my family” (p. 210). Realizing that “the answer lies in having Lakota culture and language taught in the reservation schools” (p. 213), her door-to-door campaign helped establish the Indian studies program she now heads in her school district, and she “has found peace within [her] heart through the religion of [her] ancestors” (p. 214).

I enjoyed reading *Shaping Survival*, and hope that a paperback edition is published soon, so that it could be adopted for courses about Native women, Indian education, or contemporary Plains lives. Understanding how people who are the shapers of the next generation forged their commitment to resist rather than replicate the ways they were taught increases readers’ awareness of the complexity of the educational process in a postcolonial context. The book adds richness and diversity to the portrait of Lakota women of their generation presented in previously published autobiographies, Delfine Red Shirt’s excellent *Bead on an Anthill* (1998) and the two popular volumes Mary Brave Bird Crow Dog wrote with Richard Erdoes, *Lakota Woman* (1990) and *Ohitika Woman* (1993). I hope that the Oak Lake Writers Society continues to nurture the talents of these and other writers, so that all of us can learn from these excellent teachers.

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**Signs of Cherokee Culture: Sequoyah’s Syllabary in Eastern Cherokee Life.**

By Margaret Bender. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. 187 pages. \$49.95 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

The Cherokee treaty of 1817 provided for the voluntary emigration of Cherokee to Arkansas. George Guess (also known as George Gist and as Sequoyah) was among those who moved west, decades before the forced removal in 1838. It was in Arkansas, in about 1820, that he completed his work on a writing system for the Cherokee language. By 1821 he returned to the east bringing written Cherokee messages from the western settlers to their families and friends. This new technology was met with enthusiasm (Grant Foreman, *Sequoyah*, 1938, 7).

In 1824 the Council of the Cherokee Nation authorized chiefs Path Killer and Charles R. Hicks to honor Sequoyah “for his ingenuity in the invention of the Cherokee alphabet” (Foreman, *Sequoyah*, 8). In the first decade or so of its existence, the syllabary was handwritten and used for tribal business, for recording sacred songs and prayers by traditional healers and conjurers, and for communication between distant family members. The first printed sample of the script appeared in 1827, less than eight years after its invention. In the following years, the New Testament, a collection of Christian hymns, and large portions of the *Cherokee Phoenix* newspaper were printed in the syllabary.

*Signs of Cherokee Culture* describes the meaning of Sequoyah's syllabary for the contemporary Cherokee communities of North Carolina. Bender, who lived and worked in the area from 1992–1995, describes the use of the syllabary in the context of the Christian religion, as a tool in language education, and as a marker of Cherokee identity.

Although it's commonly assumed that dialect differences between the Cherokee language spoken in North Carolina and the language of north-eastern Oklahoma result from the isolation of the two communities following Removal, Bender explains that this relatively recent separation is not the primary cause. The speech of Cherokee in Snowbird and Robbinsville, North Carolina, is in fact quite similar to Cherokee as spoken today in Oklahoma. Before the disruptions caused by the arrival of the Spanish, French, and English in the Southeast, there were perhaps as many as a half dozen distinguishable dialects. With the destruction of the lower towns in South Carolina, later of the overhill towns in Tennessee, and finally of the middle and valley towns of North Carolina and northern Georgia, the repeated mixing of survivors resulted in a blending of communities and dialects. These dialects are only indirectly recognizable, and have not been rigorously studied.

Bender observes that the two most distinct dialects, that of Qualla Boundary in North Carolina and that of Oklahoma, represent a contrast in status for eastern Cherokee speakers. They consider the language recorded in the syllabary version of the New Testament (the western dialect) to be older and purer than the eastern form that they speak. One of the interesting, and perhaps surprising, points Bender mentions is the attitude of Eastern Cherokee people to handwritten syllabary texts. Careful handwriting that mimics the serifs of the printing in the New Testament and the hymnal is considered the ideal. Rapidly written cursive signs are sometimes viewed with suspicion, being associated with the writings of the conjurers who have used the syllabary to record information about medicinal herbs and traditional treatments and spells. Bender points out that today the syllabary is much more frequently read than written.

A very useful section in *Signs of Cherokee Culture* is the discussion of the various ways to represent the Cherokee language in writing. Anyone trying to read about or learn a Native American language usually faces a variety of spelling systems, with each orthography designed to accommodate non-English sounds to the Roman alphabet in slightly different ways. Cherokee is no exception. Figure 5 (p. 63) charts four spelling systems: IPA (the International Phonetic Alphabet), "linguist's phonetics," "standard phonetics," and "easy (or Anglo) phonetics." For example, "cucumber" (a loanword from English), has been spelled *ka:kama*, *gagama*, *gahgahmah* in linguist's, standard, and easy phonetics, respectively. In addition, Cherokee is frequently written with combinations of consonant plus vowel, as if transcribing a text originally written in the syllabary, for example, *ga ga ma*. Unfortunately, the chart does not illustrate the corresponding syllabary signs, a missed opportunity to dispel the erroneous notion that the syllabary is not a true phonetic script.

Bender is, however, quite clear that the syllabary is a full writing system, capable of representing the sounds of the Cherokee language. Like any writing system, it records these sounds imperfectly. The fact that it does not encode vowel length or pitch results in identical spellings of some words that are quite distinguishable to the ear. Consequently, the syllabary is more useful to someone who already speaks Cherokee, or who has the opportunity to hear Cherokee spoken. A beginning language learner can benefit from the greater detail found in one of the orthographies based on the Roman alphabet.

The author enumerates the ways in which Cherokee people use the syllabary as a marker of Cherokee identity. Trivets with concentric circles of syllabary signs, framed prayers printed on simulated parchment, signs for tribal offices—these are recognized by all members of the community as Cherokee, but are not readable by the majority. In fact, as a tool in Cherokee language classes, the syllabary is nearly always combined with the traditional chart showing all the signs arranged in columns for the vowels and rows for each of the consonants.

Bender notes that the attitudes, that is, the linguistic ideology, of Eastern Cherokee regarding Sequoyah's syllabary, has changed over time and continues to change as it functions as an identity marker. Bender's opening chapter begins with the observation that the syllabary has never been uniformly seen as a neutral technology. "At its inception, the syllabary was received in a variety of ways by a variety of parties—native speakers, missionaries, and Cherokee and white political leaders" (p. 23).

Certainly, the syllabary serves a variety of interests today. To Cherokee speakers and readers, it remains an important tie to traditional (Christian or non-Christian) spirituality. To other tribal members it provides a source of pride, an example of Cherokee ingenuity. Many do, as Bender describes, display writings in the syllabary as a marker of their Cherokee identity.

This book brings to light important aspects of eastern Cherokee culture. It has certainly gained a place in the literature on issues of Native American identity. Bender clearly identifies herself as an observer looking in on the eastern Cherokee community. In researching the topic, she interviewed and observed a wide variety of community members, including teachers in elementary, secondary, and college level classes. She has used her observations to show how a unique aspect of Cherokee culture—the syllabary—reflects attitudes about identity and membership in the Cherokee community. One wishes that her observations would be complemented by an equally well-researched study from the perspectives of the Cherokee themselves.

As someone who proudly displays a reproduction of the Cherokee Phoenix, the Our Father on fake parchment (translated into Cherokee by my great-great-grandfather, Charles Hicks), uses the syllabary trivet on Sunday, and wishes for a watch with a syllabary typeface, I can confirm Bender's observations about the importance of the Sequoyah syllabary to the Cherokee of today. For example, she, herself, would probably be surprised to learn of the number of weekly Cherokee language classes in several California locations. A logical extension of Bender's research would be to examine the importance of the script to the Cherokee communities of northeastern Oklahoma, as well

as to the Cherokee diaspora, many of whom are speakers of Cherokee, and regard traditional syllabary documents with reverence and pride.

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**So They Understand: Cultural Issues in Oral History.** By William Schneider. Logan: Utah State University Press. 2002. 206 pages. \$22.95 paper.

In an *Oral History Review* special feature some years ago, labor historian Staughton Lynd summarized principles for conducting oral history interviews, concluding with the necessary appreciation of “doing history from below.” Although his phrase might bring to mind the somewhat disagreeable term *sub-altem* used in postcolonial theory, his explanation provides a salient précis for what William Schneider attempts to do in *So They Understand: Cultural Issues in Oral History*. “Oral history from below requires the historian to enter into the lives of poor and working people who are the protagonists of that history. Of necessity it exposes the historian’s own class and cultural limitations to the light of day. This is painful because it requires personal, not just intellectual, risktaking” (*Oral History Review* Spring 1993, p. 8). Becoming a part of the lives and communities of one’s narrators is one of the subtle expectations such communities and narrators prefer. Going into a community to “collect” oral histories and then virtually abandoning it has been standard practice for many social scientists in the past. Housing the interview notations, electronic and transcribed formats in museum-like environments, and the possibilities that portions, if not all, of this documentation might be published by presumptive scholars are circumstances to which Schneider is sensitive. Curator of oral history and an anthropologist at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Schneider values his three decades of friendships with the region’s indigenous peoples. Since 1997, he has journeyed to South Africa’s University of the North (UNIN) “with the hope that the experience would help me gain a fuller understanding of Alaska and the role of storytelling” (p. 13). Of the two regions, South Africa has more extensive oral history archives that reflect the country’s intense political conflict and have only recently been open to public access.

Schneider’s book is a discourse of self-discovery, “a personal journey with stories” as he reiterates throughout; stories are “the way we must think if we are to understand how people communicate. . . . [And the book] is a way to illustrate how understanding is an ongoing endeavor” (p. 15). Counterposing the notion of “voiceless” subjects, he fully realizes how increasingly savvy narrators are today about expropriation of taped and transcribed oral history documents, sometimes pointedly expressing their concerns about who has rights to listen to a tape and who can read its text, and debating to what degree their oral histories ought to be available to others. Schneider periodically interjects his thoughts about these issues of cultural rights and administrative jurisdiction. The issue is not altogether reconcilable for a community; the academic or coordinating community that generates an oral history